

Indonesia Briefing

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INDONESIA'S MALUKU CRISIS: THE ISSUES

I. THE SITUATION IN MALUKU

In the last eighteen months, several thousand people have died and hundreds of thousands have become refugees¹ as the result of inter-communal fighting in Maluku.² The violence has escalated over time. What began with sporadic street fighting involving only local people has evolved into a conflict with national implications, particularly with the introduction in May of the Laskar Jihad, a well-organised and well-funded radical Moslem group. Traditional weapons have been replaced by military guns and mortars. The escalating violence prompted the

¹ Estimates of the number killed vary, with 3000 accepted by most groups as the low end of the range. The real numbers are likely to be much higher. See Human Rights Watch, 'Moluccan Islands, Communal Violence in Indonesia', 29 June 2000, www.hrw.org.press/2000. The US Committee for Refugees has estimated that in 1999 some 370,000 people were displaced by the fighting in Maluku. See USIA website report, 'USCR World Refugee Statistics', 14 June 2000. Accounts of the violence come from various sources, including eyewitnesses, and these reports have been filtered through news media and community organisations. Individual accounts may be embellished or distorted but the volume of reports and diversity of sources provide considerable corroboration for these estimates and for the alleged ferocity of the massacres.

² Maluku is a disparate grouping of islands and peoples geographically dispersed from north to south over more than 1000 km and unified until 1999 for administrative convenience into one province, which is at least ten times more water than land. The province has now been split into two – Maluku for the southern half of the group and North Maluku for the northern half. There are more than twenty large islands, of which the biggest are Halmahera, Bacan and Obi in the north and Seram, Buru and Ambon in the central region of the province. Ambon, one of the major cities, is 2400 km from Jakarta. As in most parts of Indonesia, local politics have been intimately connected with patronage, access to resources and abuse of power.

Indonesian government to declare a civil emergency in late June. Affected Christian communities have appealed for international help.

The mass inter-communal violence in Maluku began in Ambon city on 19 January 1999 in a street brawl reportedly triggered by a fight between a Christian bus driver and a Moslem passenger. At least 200 people were killed in Ambon city and its environs over the following two months, but some sources report the number may have been more than 1000. The violence followed the arrival in mid-December 1998 of 200 Ambonese Christians deported from Jakarta after a deadly brawl over territory in a red-light district between rival Christian and Muslim Ambonese gangs.

On 8 March 1999, the Indonesian government formed a special Armed Forces team under Major General Suaidi Marasabessy to deal with the violence. Over the subsequent four months, the violence cooled, only to resume on 27 July, when it gained a new intensity and then spread in October to Malifut on Halmahera island. This incident involved inter-village attacks between Kao (mostly Christian) native inhabitants and Makianese (Moslem) migrants. The Makianese were resettled in Malifut in 1975, when it was feared their volcanic home island was about to explode. Relations between them and the dominant local people, the Kao, have always been poor – there have been seven small "wars" between the groups since 1975. The conflict then spread north and on 26 December 1999, nervous Christians attacked Moslem villages in Tobelo and Galela districts in Northern Halmahera, in what their leaders described as a pre-emptive strike. At least 100 were killed, and probably more.

This Christian attack on Moslem villages led to retaliation on 23 January 2000, when about 300 men, wearing white robes, are said to have attacked the Christian village of Haruku Sameth on the island of Haruku, killing eighteen out of a population of 3600, wounding many others and destroying homes with military weapons such as machine guns and grenades.³

In April 2000 a radical group based in Java, Laskar Jihad, began to agitate publicly for a Jihad (holy war) to defend Moslems in Maluku, saying they were being slaughtered and unprotected. Some Moslem politicians echoed their calls. The group's leader, Jafar Umar Thalib, an ascetic Indonesian preacher who had once fought in Afghanistan, went to the Presidential palace in Jakarta at the head of a mob carrying swords and spears to demand an end to the violence in Maluku. The President saw him for five minutes before angrily ordering him out of his office. National authorities subsequently closed the group's military-style training camp in Bogor, near Jakarta. Its members were, however, allowed to return to their base near Yogyakarta in Central Java and in May an estimated 3000 members of Laskar Jihad left Java for Halmahera and Ambon after declaring publicly their intent to go there to fight. They took control of an

³ This is according to several eye-witnesses (and victims) interviewed by a fact-finding team in April 2000. See Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Draft Report on Visit to Indonesia, 12-21 April 2000.

existing militia on Ternate, a small island off Halmahera, and used it as a base to begin terrorising northern Halmahera. On 19 June, at least 100 Christians in Duma, in the Galela district of Northern Halmahera, were killed by Laskar Jihad militias operating out of Ternate.

The military and police have stood on the sidelines as violence has raged, and some units have even participated. They have not disarmed combatants, and individual members have sold weapons to them. Army soldiers have sometimes sided with Moslems, while police paramilitary personnel have sometimes sided with Christians. The uniformed services have failed to act to protect unarmed victims. The armed forces and the police did not try to stop the Laskar Jihad's passage from Java to Maluku in May in spite of specific instructions from President Wahid that they not be allowed to leave Java. These orders were relayed both directly to Armed Forces Chief Widodo and through the civilian Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono.

On 27 June 2000, the national government declared a state of civil emergency – one step below an imposition of martial law.⁴ It gives the military and the police wide powers to act – but still under civilian command. President Wahid is ultimately responsible, with the Governor, Saleh Latuconsina, in charge in Maluku and the acting Governor, Brig. Gen. (ret.) Abdul Muhjie Effendie, in charge in North Maluku. On the day the emergency was implemented, Governor Latuconsina declared that all conflicting parties should cease their exchange of fire and hostilities. Curfew was imposed from 10 pm until 6 am. Public gatherings were banned and the community was given a general notice to surrender weapons to the authorities by 30 June 2000. Meanwhile the navy intensified its efforts to prevent the smuggling of arms into the region.

On Monday 26 June 2000, the Commander of the Pattimura Military Command, Brigadier-General Max Tamaela, a Christian, was replaced by Colonel I Made Yasa, a Balinese Hindu whom it was hoped would appear neutral to both sides. One of the deputies was also replaced. By July 2000, the uniformed strength in Maluku was at seventeen military battalions and two police paramilitary

⁴ According to the Foreign Minister, the decision was taken after a number of Ministers met with leaders of the House of Representatives. According to the 1959 Law on State Emergency, the police and the security apparatus may take all necessary steps to restore order, including the conduct of a naval blockade in the Moluccan seas; preventing the entry of suspicious elements into the territory; conducting sweeping operations to confiscate illegal weapons; imposing a curfew on the residents; replacing the military and police command in the area; imposing media black out; house-to-house searches for weapons and the wiretapping of telephone and radio communications. According to the Foreign Minister, the Indonesian police and the security forces on duty have received strict orders to respect and protect human rights. They have been instructed to avoid excessive use of force. The Office of the State Minister for Human Rights Affairs is preparing a simple manual which will be distributed to every member of the police and the security apparatus in the field so that they will know how to perform their duty without violating human rights.

battalions, totaling approximately 14,000 troops and up from a reported 5,300 one year earlier.

Despite the civil emergency, the conflict is continuing. Not only in Halmahera but also in Ambon, Christians are now on the defensive. Numerous attacks have been launched on predominantly Christian villages near Ambon causing many to flee after homes and churches were destroyed by mortars and firebombs. The Pattimura University in a mostly Christian neighbourhood has also suffered extensive damage. The military, despite being nearby, did not act, and it appears withdrew troops before the attack. In North Maluku over 400 refugees drowned when an overcrowded ship sank in a storm on its way to North Sulawesi. It is estimated that more than 100 people have been killed during the first three weeks of the civil emergency.

II. THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

The conflict in Maluku is a layered one. Though often described in terms of a Christian-Moslem conflict, economic and political competition between local interests is at its core. The Foreign Minister has said that the "conflict in Maluku is basically not a religious conflict but more an inter-communal conflict driven by local economic disparities, instigated by certain forces bent on destabilising the country."⁵

Wrapped around this core is a series of external problems, ranging from the national agenda of a resurgent group of Moslem politicians to efforts by some segments of the military to undermine the President. Defence Minister Juwono Sudarsono has said on a number of occasions that people with links to former President Suharto, both inside and outside the military, have been provoking violence in Maluku. He has refused to name them, complaining he doesn't have enough proof.⁶

The accounts that emphasise confessional cleavages generally neglect other differences underpinning the conflict. Most of the Christians in Maluku have been there for a long time, while a significant minority of the Moslems have migrated in the last 30 years. Mostly ethnic Butinese, Bugis or Makassarese from the island of Sulawesi, the Moslem immigrants are seen as more aggressive and commercially more adept than the local Christians and have made enormous economic strides. Towards the end of the Suharto years, Moslems also came to dominate the bureaucracy which had previously been Christian-dominated. Christians in Ambon have felt for some time that they were being overwhelmed.

In North Maluku the situation is even more muddled. In mid-1999, North Maluku was constituted as a separate province and jockeying began over political control. The competition has been between supporters of the traditional sultanates of Ternate and Tidore, the two small islands on Halmahera's west

⁵ Briefing by the Foreign Minister, H.E. Alwi Shihab to Foreign Ambassadors in Jakarta on Aceh, Maluku and Irian Jaya, Jakarta, 7 July 2000.

⁶ *Jakarta Post*, 15 July 2000.

coast that dominated the spice trade 200 years ago. Though both islands are predominantly Moslem, the Ternate sultan sided with the predominantly Christian Kao tribe on Halmahera after they had driven out their mostly Moslem Makianese neighbours in October of last year. Tidore sided with the Makianese and the rivalry between the two islands has coloured the conflicts in Northern Halmahera since.

The democratisation of the last two years may have also contributed to the conflict in a society that had not experienced a genuine election since the 1950s. In a relatively evenly divided society the 1999 elections stimulated party mobilisation largely along religious lines and thus exacerbated already existing tensions. The separation of North Maluku from the original province of Maluku also stimulated rivalry by creating the need to elect a new governor and this seems to have been one of the driving factors behind the initial outbreak in Halmahera. At the national level it is also possible that Gus Dur feels politically constrained by popular pressures because he has to face Muslim opposition in the MPR which could theoretically depose him in August.

As the conflict has worn on, its confessional component has become increasingly important in the eyes of both the combatants and the communities to which they have reached out for support. In the case of Moslems, that has been the national Moslem community, a significant segment of which feels that the Indonesian state is dedicated to marginalising their interests, notwithstanding the fact that nearly 90 per cent of Indonesians are Moslems. On the Christian side, they have reached out to the well-organised international Christian community, which is raising its voice and lobbying for intervention to stop the killing. These external components have reinforced the suspicions of each side, which now believe they are locked in a struggle for survival. A propaganda war of sorts is being fought on the Internet and in the newspapers. However, as aid workers, journalists and diplomats have only very limited access to the region, reports should be treated with greater than usual care. The conflict has now been sharply polarised along religious lines. As Maluku Moslems continue to reach out to Moslems elsewhere in Indonesia and Maluku Christians continue to reach out to international Christian groups, the hopes for reconciliation will get thinner.

III. THE WAY FORWARD: ISSUES NEEDING TO BE ADDRESSED

The problems in Maluku cannot be solved easily or quickly. There are powerful resource and political constraints limiting the government's room for manoeuvre. Decisive police or military action against the Laskar Jihad may provoke more widespread violence, either in Maluku or elsewhere in Indonesia. In some respects, the mass violence can be seen as just another manifestation of the chronic crisis facing Indonesia as a whole. And the resources, capacity to govern and national cohesion needed to address the national crisis are as lacking in Maluku as they are in the rest of the country.

On 17 July 2000 Gus Dur told a meeting of regional administrators in Jakarta that "Only when we are overwhelmed, maybe we will scream for logistics and equipment only, no more than that. It is the maximum that we can accept."⁷ Until then the Indonesian government had categorically rejected international involvement in any form, and it remains to be seen whether any major change of direction has been made. Certainly it has had reason to be very cautious about any presence of foreign troops, not least being the nationalist and Moslem backlash this would likely provoke. Wahid's already tenuous government could fall in the wake of such intervention, casting destabilising ripples throughout Indonesia. A large proportion of Moslems with a political stake in the conflict say they believe there is a foreign conspiracy to declare a Christian Republic of South Maluku in the region. A large foreign force would give these voices a cause to rally against.

Most international observers, ICG included, certainly do not yet have the kind of detailed information that would allow them to frame appropriate long-term policy responses in support of the Indonesian government or local community groups. But the principal influences on the government's ability to stop the violence and address the underlying causes are clear. This briefing paper aims simply to identify the issues that have contributed to the crisis in Maluku, point out their complexity and make clear that there are no easy solutions. Later ICG reports will address these issues in more detail.

A. COMMITMENT BY JAKARTA

Since taking office in October 1999, the Wahid government's response to the inherited crisis already in train for ten months in Maluku has had three main elements. First, in January 2000, the President assigned the problem to his Vice-President, Megawati Soekarnoputri, who twice visited the region for consultations but her efforts do not seem to have had much impact. The second element involved encouragement of local dialogue between regional leaders, also largely unsuccessful. The third element has been to continue the Habibie government's policy of deploying additional military and police units to trouble spots. Until the arrival of the Laskar Jihad in May, there was some evidence that the fighting was being contained.

The national government failed to respond effectively to the escalating mass violence in Maluku after the arrival of the Laskar Jihad and only seems to have formulated strong measures when it introduced the civil emergency some six months after renewed massacres broke out in December 1999.

The government faces some important national level political constraints. In contrast to Suharto's New Order, when the government could largely ignore domestic political pressures, the present government is subject to democratic pressures which need to be taken into account. Among these pressures are those emanating from that part of the Muslim community which is opposed to Gus Dur's secular brand of government. Some Muslim politicians have been using

⁷ *Jakarta Post*, 18 July 2000.

the conflict in Maluku as evidence of 'creeping Christianisation' and demanding more be done to protect the country's 'persecuted' Islamic majority. It is one of the great ironies of Indonesia that while it is predominantly Moslem, a substantial percentage of this majority feel discriminated against, and this has been a rich vein of resentment for ambitious politicians to tap through the whole history of the republic. In a revealing interview, the Justice Minister Yusril Mahendra, a politician from this camp, refused to condemn the Laskar Jihad's actions, saying there was no evidence they had engaged in illegal acts and that it was their right to travel freely about the country.⁸

B. ROLE OF THE MILITARY

The violence in Maluku and the declaration of the civil emergency has re-opened in a very dramatic way one of the issues at the heart of the Indonesian political crisis: the role of the armed forces. There are at least four problems.

The first is the demographic composition of units. There is no doubt that military personnel have become involved on both sides of the conflict in Maluku because of religious and personal sympathies. Locally recruited troops are either Moslem or Christian and therefore easily drawn into the conflict. It had been hoped that troops brought from outside would be more 'neutral' but some of them, too, have also become involved.

Secondly, it is widely believed that some elements in the military are promoting violence as a way of warning the government to back off from investigations into past military atrocities. Senior officers are fond of saying their troops are afraid to act because of the fear of future prosecutions. Many would also like to see martial law, as opposed to the current civil emergency, declared in the province.

Thirdly, although the violence cannot be contained without resort to paramilitary and military methods, public opinion is reluctant to give the military more extensive powers. This reluctance is quite natural in the light of recent history and it helps to explain the use of the civil emergency as opposed to a declaration of a military emergency.

And fourthly, even the disciplined elements of the armed forces face severe operational constraints in the areas of capabilities and logistics. Government forces in Maluku face three operational problems: inadequate transportation, poor training in measured application of force in a civil emergency,⁹ and the question of isolation or remoteness of many settlements. The inadequacy of local resources is evident from the case of the remote town of Tual, some 540 km southeast of Ambon city, where violence broke out in March 1999, and where

⁸ Interview with ICG, 29 June 2000.

⁹ The Office of the State Minister for Human Rights Affairs is preparing a simple manual which will be distributed to every member of the police and the security apparatus in the field so that they will know how to perform their duties without violating human rights.

there were only twelve policemen.¹⁰ Thirty additional police were assigned there after the violence occurred. The situation was described by the TNI spokesman in late June in fairly hopeless terms because of lack of reliable logistic support: "There are hundreds of islands, while we haven't many vessels." According to a local activist the military commander took the view of "Let them fight ... all my troops can do is cordon off the two communities."

Another problem is that military salaries are very low. Soldiers therefore have an incentive to use chaotic conditions to seek additional income. The more chaotic conditions are, the more people are prepared to pay for protection. There are reports of troops refusing to move to an area where there is a clash before getting money from the people under attack. It is also well known that modern arms have been provided to the combatants – sometimes out of sympathy but also for purely commercial reasons.

Not to be discounted is the demoralisation of many field troops, who now feel attacked from all sides, with human rights investigations mounting. When 1000 Moslems descended on the village of Poka on 3 July, a platoon stationed there withdrew and did not return with reinforcements. Though this could indicate military complicity, some military analysts believe it points to a fear of taking any action at all because they'll be blamed. "What do you want us to do, shoot them all? Then you'll say we violated human rights," Air Vice Marshal Graitto Usodo, the military spokesman, said in a recent interview.¹¹

C. MALUKU'S CIVIL ADMINISTRATION

In achieving the goals of the declaration of the civil emergency, the governors of Maluku and North Maluku provinces have a central role but in both provinces civil administration appears to have largely broken down. The local parliament is unable to meet and many officials have fled. Communications between the remaining officials is difficult. According to a local source, there is no operating prison on the island of Ambon, since it had been burned down.

It might be argued that what the two provinces need is government leadership in which both Muslims and Christians are represented more or less in proportion to their numbers in the community. But how can such balanced representation be achieved in present circumstances? The difficulties of achieving such representation in places like Northern Ireland need to be kept in mind. If it were easy to establish such a balance, the whole problem would probably not have erupted.

Another possible alternative might be a completely new 'colonial-style' administration consisting of personnel from other parts of Indonesia. While such an emergency administration might be helpful in the short run, it would surely run into local opposition over time and could not provide a long-term solution.

¹⁰ *AFP*, 1 April 1999.

¹¹ ICG interview, 5 July 2000. The description of the incident in Poka came from eyewitnesses and Christian activists in Ambon.

D. EMERGENCY POWERS AND ARREST POLICY

The most important recent policy initiative taken by the government has been the declaration of civil emergency. The whole issue of emergency rule remains contested and brings up several very difficult issues.

An important element in Indonesian public opinion rejects any move that strengthens the position of the military because they expect that the military will continue to misuse their powers. They identify the involvement of military personnel in the conflict in Maluku as one of the reasons why it has been so difficult to stop. The granting of additional powers to the military, in their view, will only exacerbate the conflict.

The opposite view argues that an emergency should have been introduced much earlier – the military wanted it in March last year but President Habibie feared that this might pave the way for a more general return of the military to positions of authority. Supporters of this view argue that it is only the military that has the capacity to impose order. Some among them say that the present civil emergency which puts authority in the hands of the governor does not give the military enough power, and therefore advocate a full military emergency in which provincial authority would be transferred to the regional military commander.

Another aspect of this debate focuses on an emergency bill introduced by the Habibie government and adopted by the parliament in September last year. This bill requires consultation with the parliament at the national level and the relevant provincial parliaments. But because of the anti-military atmosphere and massive student demonstrations at that time, President Habibie decided not to sign the bill. Another opinion, recognising the need for some kind of emergency rule, advocates the adoption – perhaps with further amendments – of the relatively liberal and democratic 1999 emergency bill.

The current emergency rule gives the military and police wide powers to arrest those responsible for violence. An important circuit-breaker in the violence could arguably be the arrest of key perpetrators but there are difficult problems thrown up by even that possibility: who to arrest, and who would do the arresting? Given the amount of killing and destruction, the number who have broken the normal criminal law is very large. Given the involvement of substantial elements of the army and police, it is difficult to imagine that any process of arrest and detention would be free from the hatreds that have led to the violence. Even in places like Jakarta, the military and police have no appetite for arresting perpetrators of communal violence. In Maluku, with its political overtones, they are doubly reticent.

E. LONGER TERM ISSUES: INTERNAL MIGRATION AND SEGREGATION

There seems to be no short-term path to peace in Maluku. This raises the issue of whether the only short-term solution lies in the physical separation of hostile communities. Some elements in the armed forces are arguing that it may be

necessary to segregate the two main communities through some sort of formal segregation policy. They point to the fact that in many parts of the two provinces this has already happened on the ground as a result of refugee movements caused by the fighting.

Others, on the other hand, believe that a formal policy of segregation is defeatist and will only consolidate the division of society into hostile camps and provide no foundation for peace in the long term. They argue that "religious" cleansing of the sort being conducted by the Laskar Jihad should not be rewarded, and that reconciliation between the two communities is possible in the longer term. Opponents of segregation uphold the Indonesian ideal that citizens of the nation should be free to move to, and reside, anywhere within the archipelago. But such movement has also been at the core of inter-communal conflict in Maluku, as it has been in other parts of Indonesia.

IV. CONCLUSION

The conflict in Maluku has complex origins that go back many years. It is important that the international community be aware of these issues when reacting to developments in this region. But however complex and difficult to resolve the issues may be, there is one thing that is clear beyond argument: the Indonesian authorities, especially the military, need to fundamentally reassess their recent performance, and address this challenge with much more vigour than they have so far displayed.

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